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THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY'S COOPERATION IN THE REDEMPTION: AN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

*Rev. Judith Marie Gentle, Ph.D.**

In his classic work on heaven and hell, *The Great Divorce*, my famous Anglican confrere, C. S. Lewis, provides a vivid depiction of what hell is like. He describes it as a town where all the inhabitants are quarrelsome. Their quarrels with one another are so constant that they are continually moving from house to house and from street to street to get away from one another. This moving away from one another has been going on for so long that no one would think seriously about turning around and going back to the center from which they each came. All of the inhabitants have built houses that please them individually without ever realizing that they have needs that only living in proximity with others can fulfill.¹ In Lewis' words, "The trouble is they have no needs. You get everything you want just by imagining it. That's why it never costs any trouble to move to another street or build another house."² They have no use for or need for what Lewis calls "real things."³

Contrast this image of hell with the image we have of the first Christian community as it awaited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after the Lord's Ascension. The Acts of the Apostles describes this community as one where the apostles and other

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¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), 9-12.

² Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 13.

³ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 14.

disciples of the Lord, including the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, are gathered together and devoted "with one accord" to prayer. St. Luke also tells us that in the midst of this community is "Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:13-14). In both books of the New Testament attributed to St. Luke, whenever the Holy Spirit intervenes directly in human history in a salvific way, Mary is present and prominent. We know she is the key to the action of the Holy Spirit when God the Son becomes incarnate from her very flesh in her womb. And, since St. Luke mentions Mary the Mother of Jesus in this scene in the upper room at Pentecost, we are left to ponder just how she is likewise the key when the Holy Spirit empowers a motley, frightened band of men and women to become the Lord's witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). St. Luke tells us that by the Power of the Holy Spirit, Joel's prophecy that both the sons and daughters of Israel would prophesy actually begins to happen (Acts 2:17). In an event that begins to reverse the curse of Babel, tongues of fire fall upon each of the men and women gathered in the upper room and they begin witnessing to Jesus Christ, proclaiming that He is both Lord and Messiah in all the languages of the earth, in a way that all the peoples of the earth could hear. The Acts of the Apostles records that many people of "good will" received the Gospel just as promised by the angels upon the Birth of Jesus Christ. Many were saved and countless lives were changed by the grace and mercy of God poured out on the whole world in Jesus Christ.

And, yes, the Acts of the Apostles also records that right away there were disagreements and squabbles in the early Christian community regarding such things as the importance of circumcision verses faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah. Nonetheless, the Gift of the Holy Spirit prevailed and salvation by Jesus Christ and faith in Him as both Lord and Messiah were finally considered to be the essential and defining characteristic of what it meant to be a Christian, not circumcision. Jewish Christians most probably still opted to be circumcised while Greek Christians considered this optional. We might liken this to our contemporary differences over matters of church discipline, liturgical style, and language used for doctrinal expression verses faith in the Eternal Realities and Mysteries that our

words, styles of worship, and ways of organizing are meant to express and lead us into a deeper experience. This early Church described for us in the Acts of the Apostles models for us unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

If we survey the ecumenical scene today, some forty-plus years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, we must admit that we hover somewhere on the continuum between Lewis's vision of hell, where we are all separated in houses of our own making and isolated by the works of our own imaginations, and the glorious promise of Pentecost, where people with their various and individual perspectives and gifts are brought together by the Power of the Holy Spirit in a way that they can proclaim to the world with one accord, yet in differing tongues, that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Messiah. Whenever we seem to be moving closer to the vision and hope that Pentecost offers us, some event seems to happen that sets us back on the path toward the hell that Lewis describes, where we all go our separate ways "like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). In response to the Lord's call to "Come" across the waters of our divisions, we manage to take our eyes off our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and put them on ourselves and the works of our own imaginations. Consequently, we sink like a stone (Matt. 14: 28-30).

As we have all known and been praying about for some time, the entire universal body of believing Christians is in dire need of a New Pentecost, of a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that will enable us to hear one another and proclaim the Truth about Jesus Christ across our divisions, with one accord, in spite of and even with our differing gifts and perspectives, so that the full measure of Gentiles may be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ, as St. Paul prophesied in Romans 11:25. St. Paul also tells us that this reconciliation will then allow all of Israel to be saved and come to recognize that Jesus is Lord—*Adonai*, in the full Hebrew sense of being *Yahweh*-among-us, Emmanuel, God-with-us and Enfleshed-for-us—and no mere human prophet or teacher, as well as their long-hoped-for Messiah (Romans 11:26-27).

In addition to St. Paul's prophecy about what will be required for the conversion of the Jews, we also know from the

Lord's own prayer the night before He was crucified that it is only when we who are baptized into Him are reconciled to each other and learn to love and come into communion with one another, a communion that is like that of the Blessed Trinity Itself, that the whole world will come to know that we are His disciples (John 13:35) and that Jesus is God enfleshed and the Savior of all humankind (John 17:21). Certainly, this miracle will be at the heart of that New Pentecost for which we all long, a communion where there is diversity of persons, and, we can add from the first Pentecost, a diversity of languages and gifts, yet solidarity in our proclamation of and witness to the Truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Speaking specifically as an Anglican and as a Western Christian, I could carry on for several days about the checkered history of our recent ecumenical efforts. Lately, it seems we are taking two steps backward for every one step forward. Our human efforts are just not accomplishing the task. For example, the initial elation that Anglo-Catholics, such as myself, felt over the 2005 ARCIC document on Our Lady, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, that formally legitimated for all Anglicans belief in the doctrines of both the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, was dealt a harsh blow by a careful reading of this same document. It contains some very problematic and even false statements, historically speaking, that perpetuate unjust stereotypes that have divided us for years. For example, paragraph 44 of *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* unabashedly claims that "[O]ne powerful impulse for Reformation in the early sixteenth century was a widespread reaction against devotional practices which approached Mary as a Mediatrix alongside Christ, or sometimes even in his place." As I have refuted at length elsewhere (in a paper on this ARCIC document presented in the UK at a conference called to discuss this very document),⁴ the latest historical scholarship on the

⁴ Rev. Judith Marie Gentle, Ph.D., "Setting the Historical Record Straight: A Critical Appraisal of ARCIC's View of the State of Marian Doctrine and Devotion both Prior to and Since the Reformation," presented at the ESBVM-UK/Ireland 2006 Conference, Aylesford Priory. A re-print issued with the author's permission can be found at: http://motherofallpeoples.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=835&Itemid=40.

period preceding the English Reformation by reputable researchers such as Eamon Duffy⁵ shows these old stereotypes to be a complete fabrication and even a destructive lie.

The devotion of the English people both to Jesus Christ and His Mother did indeed reflect that she was considered to be the Mediatrix alongside her Son. At the point of the English Reformation, there was hardly a chapel or church nave that did not have a Lady Altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary alongside the main altar. While there may certainly have been some who misunderstood or even misused devotion to Our Lady, just as there are today, historical studies of “a wide variety of sources, from liturgical books to painted images, from saints’ lives and devotional treatises to play-texts, and from churchwardens’ accounts and ecclesiastical court records to commonplace books and wills,”⁶ demonstrate that on the eve of the Reformation in England, the practice of the Catholic Faith “had about it no particular marks of exhaustion or decay.”⁷ Both the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium* of the common English people, with regard to Our Lady’s role as Mediatrix alongside her Son, are completely in line with the various ways Catholic Christians, East and West, have expressed this doctrine and devotion, dating from the early Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

For example, historical studies of what were then called “primers or Books of Hours (*Horae*), which by the eve of the Reformation were being produced in multiple editions in thousands, in formats ranging from the sumptuous to the skimpy, and varying in price from pounds to a few pence,”⁸ show that one of the key elements of most of the primers used during this period was the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. The Little Office “included some of the most beautiful and accessible parts of the psalter . . . accentuated by Marian antiphons,

⁵ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 3-4.

⁷ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 4.

⁸ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 209.

lessons, and collects celebrating the beauty, goodness, and merciful kindness of the Virgin. . . .⁹ One of the other interesting characteristics of the primers was a rubric, following the various Latin prayers, urging one to say the Our Father and the Hail Mary because the words of these two key prayers summarized the Christian mystery and had formed "the basis of the church's catechetical activity since the thirteenth century" for lay people unschooled in Latin.¹⁰

In England, as elsewhere in Christian Europe, St. Bernard's tradition of affective meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ accompanied by a similar meditation on the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady was without rival and formed "the central devotional activity of all seriously minded Christians."¹¹ Devotion to the Wounds of Christ was accompanied by devotion to the Sorrows of Mary. As it developed in the Middle Ages, devotion to the Sorrows of Our Lady, the *Mater Dolorosa*, was and still is an important part of the hierarchy of truths. Certainly, it was one way that persons could comprehend their own grief and suffering "in the face of successive waves of plague" sweeping the continent of Europe.¹² More importantly, such meditation enabled English laity and clergy alike to ponder correctly the mystery of Our Lady's role in Redemption. Not only is identifying the sufferings of Christ with the sorrows of His Mother a meditation that is entirely biblically orthodox, it is also a way to appropriate the salvific meaning of all human suffering in light of the Incarnation. If the "co-passion" of the Mother's grief is caught up into, and even part of, the Mystery of the Redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ Himself, then uniting my own suffering to the Mystery of the united grief of the Mother and the Son gives my suffering salvific value as well.¹³

My conclusion after carefully studying the research of Eamon Duffy is that any widespread negative reaction to devotion to Our Lady was on the part of the reformers themselves

⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 210.

¹⁰ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 219.

¹¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 231; 234-5.

¹² Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 259.

¹³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 259.

and entirely unwarranted by the devotional life of the average Catholic Christian living in England on the eve of the Reformation. In fact, Duffy's work reveals that the "fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in England witnessed a period of massive catechetical enterprise on the part of not only the bishops and parochial clergy . . . , but also on the part of members of religious orders."¹⁴ His research clearly demonstrates that the Reformation in England "was a violent disruption, not the natural fulfillment, of most of what was vigorous" and orthodox in late medieval English religious practice and devotion.¹⁵ "If the framers of the ARCIC document on Our Lady had perhaps done their homework in this regard, they would have included an apology to Our Lady and the people living at the time of the Reformation, rather than laying blame on devotion to her as being a 'powerful impetus for the Reformation.'¹⁶

I mentioned above that devotion to Our Lady as the Sorrowful Mother, certainly under the various titles that this mystery has spawned in East and West, is an important part of the hierarchy of truths. It is one that is often neglected and misunderstood, yet one that cries out to be emphasized and embraced in our increasingly complex and suffering world. It is the mystery pointed to by Colossians 1:24, namely, that while there is one Mediator, Jesus Christ, you and I, through our suffering, fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, the Church. Thus, in that sense all who are united to Christ, by Grace and even by the common bond of humanity that we now share with Him by virtue of His Incarnation, are Christ's co-redeemers and God's co-workers (1 Cor. 3:9), with Our Lady being the primary one to share in the sufferings of Christ as Co-Redemptrix, a title used in the Western Catholic tradition that is entirely warranted by Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2:35—"and you yourself a sword will pierce."

¹⁴ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 2-3.

¹⁵ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 4.

¹⁶ Gentle, "Setting the Historical Record Straight: A Critical Appraisal of ARCIC's View of the State of Marian Doctrine and Devotion both Prior to and Since the Reformation," 7.

I brought up this latest ARCIC document on Our Lady to demonstrate that as regards our moving closer to the hope and reality of a New Pentecost, as we take one step forward, we seem to take one step backwards. Lest my discussion above should add fuel to the fire of another myth, namely, that it is non-Roman Catholics, or rather concern for reunion with them on the part of Roman Catholics, that has obfuscated many of the theological insights and devotional practices among Roman Catholics on Our Lady's mediation of Grace and role as Co-Redemptrix since Vatican II, I must tell you the rest of the story. While some may not feel this is appropriate for print, I have gotten to the point where I can no longer keep some things silent. The times in which we live are too serious. A trusted colleague and member of the ARCIC committee that drafted the document on Our Lady revealed to me that it was not an Anglican, but rather a Roman Catholic on the committee, who strongly insisted that mention of Our Lady's Mediation as a principal cause of the Reformation in England be included in the document. When I heard this, I was heartsick!

Lest you think this is merely anecdotal evidence, I must tell you that it seems entirely too plausible to me. At the meeting in the United Kingdom that I previously mentioned, where I presented a paper on Eamon Duffy's research to refute this historical gaffe in the ARCIC document regarding Our Lady's Mediation, I also spent considerable ink and time explicating the historic tradition that demonstrates that Our Lady is Mother of Redemption because she is Mother of the Redeemer, based largely upon my study of St. Louis de Montfort as published in *Jesus Redeeming in Mary*.¹⁷ The principal objector to my presentation was a Roman Catholic religious who stood up and said very loudly and very sorely that she was very offended by any mention of Mary as Mother. In a similar vein, at a recent conference at Boston College entitled "Foremothers in Faith: Historic Women for Our Time," Dr. Lisa Sowle

¹⁷ Judith Marie Gentle, Ph.D., *Jesus Redeeming in Mary* (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 2003).

Cahill from the department of theology said: "Ask Catholics who the most important woman in the New Testament is, and the answer will probably be Mary, the mother of Jesus. And she is important, but not because she is the biological mother of Jesus so much as because she is a disciple."¹⁸ My question is: "What happened to the Incarnation? Does anyone have any clue at all about the meaning of that Mystery, upon which the whole Mystery of Redemption is based in the first place?"

I have shared with you merely one scenario regarding one aspect of the ecumenical climate from my perspective as an Anglican to show you the times. It is my sincere belief and experience that we are at the point in our efforts at the reunion of Christians where only divine intervention can move us away from the hell that Lewis describes into that fullness of a second Pentecost and the promises prophesied by St. Paul and the Lord Himself that will result. Furthermore, if we spend any time listening to the daily news, we can see how ripe the world we live in is for this Intervention. Lately, I have been in numerous ecumenical gatherings of Christians where concern about the murder of the unborn child in the womb, deterioration of the family, and the trend to extend marriage to gay and lesbian couples in Western society has moved from hopefulness that our efforts to stem the tide will work to a profound realization that the only thing that will save us is divine intervention. Added to dilemmas such as these, which are symptomatic of the ongoing crisis of truth in the West, daily reports of economic hardships, soaring gas prices, and natural disasters abound. While those of us gathered in this room may be praying for a New Pentecost, many Evangelical Protestant groups are praying daily for a Revival to sweep not only our country but also the entire world. I think it is safe to say that many Christians across the broad spectrum of the universal Church sincerely believe that only some, new, direct intervention of God can bring us out of the darkness in which we are now living. And in fact, it

¹⁸ Lisa Sowle Cahill, Ph.D., "The Apostle" [one section], in "Foremothers: Five Women Theologians on the Women Who Inspire Them," *Boston College Magazine* (Spring 2008): 49.

seems as if God is allowing the darkness for just such a "fullness of time" to present itself on the world stage.

Now we are back to the beginning of my paper and at the heart of what I have to say. I am daily more and more convinced that it is only in corresponding to the Lord's final word addressed directly to all of us, as recorded in St. John's Gospel, immediately before He died, not merely as a hope but really with the weight of a final directive and even command for us to obey, that our hopes lie—namely, "Behold, your Mother"(John 19:27). In this final directive and command, the Lord Jesus Himself seems to be revealing to us what St. Luke alludes to in both the Gospel and the Book of the Acts, namely, for the Mystery of Redemption to be accomplished in all its fullness, Mary must be at the center of our gathering and our lives as our "Mother." If we look carefully at the wording of chapter 19 in the Gospel of St. John, we notice that after having given us this directive, through the proxy of the only apostle who remained with the Lord at the Cross, St. John's Gospel records this: "After this, aware that everything was now finished," Jesus goes on to say "I thirst." Two great Saints and Blesseds of our time, namely St. Faustina Kowalska and Bl. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, have told us "I thirst" really means that the Lord was expressing not so much His thirst for the wine offered Him on a sprig of hyssop but rather a thirst for the salvation of souls. After taking the wine, the Lord Jesus hands over His spirit and dies (John 19: 28-30).

"Behold, your Mother." It is only with this final directive to us, that all is finished, in the sense of having been completed. It will only be in our full compliance with this directive, that the work of the Redemption itself can be finished, in the sense of completed. Mary's cooperation in the Redemption is exactly the Mystery the Lord was pointing to when He told us, "Behold, your Mother." Why do I say this? It is none other than the ontological Reality of Grace that makes us truly adopted sons and daughters of God as well as brothers and sisters in Christ. Because of the Incarnation, all human persons are now united with God the Son through both the natural bonds of our common humanity that God the Son has united to His Divine Person and the supernatural Life of the Divine Indwelling that

is offered to us, if, as the Lord tells us in the Gospel of John, we believe that He has been sent by the Father and that He and the Father are One; if we trust Him as our Divine Savior; and if we love Him and keep His commandments.

Furthermore, all Christians who live in a state of grace, regardless of which household of faith they live in, have received this totally free and undeserved Gift of Divine Mercy and Grace in Jesus Christ by one means and one means only. It is mediated to us and the whole world only through the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, that is, through the material means of human flesh and blood united to the Divine Person of God the Son. In Jesus Christ, the material reality of human flesh and blood, united to His Divine Person, becomes divinized in the fullest sense. Consequently, it is the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ that reveals God to us, atones for sin, and conveys Grace to the whole world and indeed the whole creation.

As the Letter to the Hebrews tells us so beautifully, we can now “confidently approach the throne of Grace to receive Mercy and to find Grace” because Jesus Christ obtained “eternal redemption” for us “with His own blood” and consecrated us to make us holy “through the offering” of His own body “once for all” (Heb. 4:16; 9:12; 10:10). All that the Hebrew Scriptures reveal about the necessity of the shedding of blood for both forgiveness and purification is fulfilled in the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is none other than His Sacred Humanity that provides the matter for the Sacrifice. And, as St. John so beautifully proclaims, it is that Sacred Humanity that has now made it possible for us to hear, see with our own eyes, look upon, and touch with our hands the very Word of life. And it is that Life, indeed the eternal Life of God, God Himself made visible to us in Jesus Christ, that makes it possible for us to have fellowship with Him and the Father and one another (1John 1:1-3). Additionally, it is the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ that makes the seven sacraments efficacious means of Grace and not mere religious rituals or dead works.

And, this Sacred Humanity and all that it accomplishes in redeeming the whole world and revealing the Face of the Living God has only one ontological source, by Divine Design. It is none other than the promised woman of Genesis 3:15; the

one whom Jesus addresses as "Woman" in the Gospel of St. John; the one who, as St. Luke tells us, conceives and gives birth to Him virginally, as a true Mother, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, but only after having given her free and full consent—Mary of Nazareth.

The more that we truly behold the full meaning of what it means that Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ, the very Mother of God, the more we come to understand that she is not only His Mother but the Mother of the very Redemption and Revelation that He brings. She is Mother to all who are brothers and sisters "in Christ" by virtue of His Divine Life in their souls, mediated only by His Sacred Humanity taken from her. She is the Mother of all peoples because humanity itself, through God the Son's incarnation from her flesh, has now been brought into union with the Triune God. Just as Jesus directed us to say "Our Father," He is also directing and even commanding us to say "Our Mother."

Guillaume Gibieuf, a member of the seventeenth-century Bérullian School of French Spirituality, the same school that formed St. Louis de Montfort, said in talking about the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Blessed Virgin's role in it: "Do not say that Mary is a human creature elevated to the dignity of Mother of God; say rather, that the incomparable dignity of Mother of God is established in a human being. For in fact, it would be to err, to conceive the Divine Maternity as a quality added to this creature; it is her being, her substance, her all. . . . Everything is determined and influenced by the greatness and preeminence of this dignity, and not by the lowliness of her earthly condition which she has in common with us."¹⁹

It is important to reiterate that the Blessed Virgin Mary's Role in her Motherhood, the Incarnation and, therefore, Redemption itself, was anything but passive, as some mistakenly fear, think or teach. In fact, the role of women in general, both in the act of procreation itself and as mother, is anything but passive! It is entirely active. Mary is not a mere, passive,

¹⁹ G. Gibieuf, *La vie et les grandeurs de la très sainte Vierge* (2 vols.; Paris: Joseph Cottureau, 1637).

physical instrument or receptacle that God the Son simply utilized or within whom He deposited Himself. Instead, Mary is an authentic, active “helpmate” and partner in the very act of the Incarnation of God the Son. To say or think otherwise would be to think of the Incarnation as some kind of rape, subjugation or involuntary slavery. Excuse me for saying this, but, again I feel I must be candid about some things because of the constant climate of misunderstanding that keeps rearing its head in new ways. On the Contrary! St. Louis de Montfort speaks beautifully of the Incarnation as the fulfillment of a love affair between the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Listen to his words in the following passage from one of his little known works, *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, in which the saint speaks of God the Son by the name ‘Divine Wisdom’:

Wondrous to relate, . . . Divine Wisdom chose to leave the bosom of the Father and enter the womb of a virgin and there repose amid the lilies of her purity. Desiring to give Himself to her by becoming man in her, He sent the archangel Gabriel to greet her on His behalf and to declare to her that she had won His heart and that He would become man within her if she gave her consent. The archangel fulfilled his mission and assured her that she would still remain a virgin while becoming a mother. . . . Mary wholeheartedly gave the angel that priceless consent which the Blessed Trinity, all the angels and the whole world awaited for so many centuries. . . . “Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be done to me according to your word.”²⁰

Similarly, another of my noted Anglican confreres, and soon-to-be-declared “Blessed,” John Henry Newman, in his famous apologetic letter to Rev. E. B. Pusey, dated December 7, 1865, corrects Pusey’s and others’ false view that the Blessed Virgin was “only a physical instrument of our redemption.”²¹ Newman

²⁰ St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, par.107. [Note: A valuable source for the works of St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort is *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St. Louis Mary de Montfort* (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1988).]

²¹ John Henry Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching* (2 vols.; London: Longmans, Green, 1914), 2:36.

points out to Pusey that the “rudimental teaching of Antiquity” concerning the Blessed Virgin is none other than Mary is the Second Eve.²² He bases his conclusion upon the writings of the three Fathers of the Church normally associated with this strain of sacred tradition, namely, St. Justin Martyr, St. Irenaeus and Tertullian. What is most significant in Newman’s explication of the various passages he quotes from these three Fathers is Newman’s insistence that “they do not speak of the Blessed Virgin merely as the physical instrument of our Lord’s taking flesh, but as an intelligent, responsible cause of it; her faith and obedience being accessories to the Incarnation, and gaining it as her reward.”²³

Newman’s use of the word “reward” here does not imply that Our Lady merited the Incarnation because her own deeds were in themselves meritorious. Such an interpretation would imply that a mere human creature could be the primary cause of God’s coming down from heaven to become Incarnate. Rather, in line with what we just heard from St. Louis de Montfort about the love affair that existed between not only Mary and Divine Wisdom but also between Mary and the entire Blessed Trinity, Newman echoes for Pusey, and for us today, what the three Fathers of the Church just mentioned above said about Mary’s active role in the Motherhood of the Son and, therefore, her cooperation in the Redemption that resulted:

[S]he co-operated in our salvation not merely by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her body, but by specific holy acts, the effect of the Holy Ghost within her soul; that, as Eve forfeited privileges by sin, so Mary earned privileges by the fruits of grace; that, as Eve was disobedient and unbelieving, so Mary was obedient and believing; that, as Eve was a cause of ruin to all, Mary was a cause of salvation to all; that as Eve made room for Adam’s fall, so Mary made room for our Lord’s reparation of it; and thus, whereas the free gift was not as the offence, but much greater, it follows that, as Eve co-operated in effecting a great evil, Mary co-operated in effecting a greater good.²⁴

²² Newman, *Certain Difficulties* ..., 2:31.

²³ Newman, *Certain Difficulties* ..., 2:35.

²⁴ Newman, *Certain Difficulties* ..., 2:36.

In order to understand the deeper significance of what Newman is saying, let us take a look at exactly what is meant by the word "cause" or "causality," as Newman uses it, theologically speaking, in regard to the relationship between the Second Adam and the Second Eve. Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., offers a very helpful theological explanation about how to speak of God's mediating work in the created order, its being accomplished at one and the same time by both the mediation of the One Mediator and the mediation of the Blessed Virgin.

Fr. Lagrange says that while we can rightly speak of the work of Redemption as proceeding entirely from the Blessed Trinity as the First Cause of grace, entirely from Jesus Christ as principal and perfect Mediator, and entirely from Mary as Mediatrix, these three causes are not like three men who coordinate in dragging the same load, with each one partially carrying his share of the load. Rather, as regards these three causes in the work of Redemption, "the second acts under the influence of the first, and the third under the influence of the second. An example that may make the point clear is that of the fruit which proceeds entirely from God the Author of nature, entirely from the tree, and entirely from the branch on which it grows. It does not proceed in its different parts from different causes: neither is our Redemption the work in part of the Divinity, in part of the Humanity, and in part of Mary."²⁵ In other words, while there is certainly a "hierarchy of being" involved, it is correct to say that the work of Redemption proceeds, as a totality, at one and the same time from Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is how one can say, with Newman and the Fathers, that Mary is truly a "cause" of our Redemption. It is also a primary reason that Mary can be called "Co-Redemptrix," where "co" is understood to be a derivative of the Latin word *cum*, which means "with." She is the Woman who works with, or alongside, the Redeemer, as an active "helpmate" to effect our salvation.

²⁵ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, trans. Bernard J. Kelly, C.S.Sp. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1993), 177.

Additionally, Newman points out that Mary's causality involves not only her giving her own body to be the source of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ but also the offering of her will's complete *fiat* in a loving self-offering of union with the one Divine Will, shared by the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. This is seen in Newman's saying to Pusey that Mary's co-operation in our salvation occurred "not merely by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her body, but by specific holy acts, the effect of the Holy Ghost within her soul; that, as Eve forfeited privileges by sin, so Mary earned privileges by the fruits of grace. . . . whereas the free gift was not as the offence, but much greater, it follows that, as Eve co-operated in effecting a great evil, Mary co-operated in effecting a greater good."²⁶ With this comment, Newman is pointing to one of the most frequently misunderstood aspects of Catholic theology, namely, the relationship between grace and human freedom, especially as this mystery operates in one who was graced by, in Newman's words, the "privilege"²⁷ of the Immaculate Conception.

In order to open up the depth of what Newman is communicating to Pusey, and us, regarding Mary's role in Redemption, I would like to cite a passage from *Jesus Redeeming in Mary* (pp. 117-118):

While all that Mary is in herself was God's gift to her from the beginning, she still had to choose to correspond to the profound graces given her on a daily basis in order for God's desires for her to be fulfilled. (Although) Mary was profoundly and uniquely graced by God, such grace did not in any way degrade or lessen the importance of her free will. She was as free to choose to live in union with God and the divine Will as were Adam and Eve.

By saying that Mary was as free as Adam and Eve to choose faithful obedience to God, we mean that her freedom was not in any way enslaved like ours by the wounding of original sin commonly called concupiscence, i.e., by the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the lust for holding first place.²⁸ When we truly understand the importance of

²⁶ Newman, *Certain Difficulties* . . . , 2:36.

²⁷ Newman, *Certain Difficulties* . . . , 2:36.

²⁸ See 1 John 2:16 and St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publ., 1992), 44.

God's ensuring that Mary really had such freedom, we can see the necessity of the preservative Redemption given to her as the Second Eve in the grace of the Immaculate Conception with a whole new light. In other words, God saw to it that neither the unforgiven guilt nor the unruly effects of original sin on the human appetites would in any way hinder Mary in being truly free to choose for or against God. As Catholic teaching affirms, this unique grace was made possible only in anticipation of the salvation made possible by Jesus Christ. In giving this grace to Mary, God really and truly signified a fresh start for the human race. Since she is truly the new Eve both created and redeemed by God, the Blessed Virgin Mary's *fiat* was capable of having a truly "recapitulating" or "re-heading" significance for the entire human race, in union with and in subordination to the divine *Fiat* of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we can even say that it is precisely because God had uniquely graced Mary to be Eve's equal in the real freedom to choose for God—and against Satan—that Mary's *fiat* was such a "priceless consent."²⁹

Furthermore, since God Himself had set Mary's freedom free from original sin's disordering effects, as well as giving her a share in His own inner life that enabled her to love and trust Him, Mary was all the more capable of giving an authentic and full human consent. If His grace had reduced the significance or need for her human consent in any way, then the very humanity God the Son assumed from her would not have been a real humanity and Redemption could not have happened. Because grace made Mary so *fully* and perfectly human, her consent mattered all the more for the entire human race. Her full and perfect humanity made it possible for God the Son to receive a *fully* human nature from her, by the Power of the Holy Spirit.³⁰

In summary and in closing, it is my belief that it is this Mystery of the Divine Maternity, and indeed of the very Incarnation of God itself, established in Mary, with her free and full consent, that, from an ecumenical perspective, can form the bridge of our common understanding of not only who Mary is but also of who we are—in both her and her Divine Son. It can also form the basis for Christians of all communions to "Behold, our Mother" and, together, ponder the Mystery of her Co-Redemption.

²⁹ Grignon de Montfort, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, par. 107.

³⁰ Crawley-Boevey, Father Mateo, *Refuting the Attack on Mary*, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Catholic Answers, 1999), 49.

I like what Bl. Mother Teresa of Calcutta is reported to have said when someone asked her if Mary is Co-Redemptrix. She said: "Without Mary, there is no Jesus." And, we would have to add that without Jesus, there is no Mary, because all that we have said about Mary is the greatest act of Mercy and Grace that the Blessed Trinity has ever and will ever accomplish. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the Masterpiece of the entire Creation. She has been graced, called and gifted as no other creature.

It is in Mary that one of the cries of the Reformation, *sola gratia*, can be seen in all its fullness and indeed in its fullest realization. Conversely, it is in Mary that the Catholic insistence that we must cooperate with Grace can also be seen in all its fullness and in its fullest realization. For never has there been, nor ever will there be, a creature who has so perfectly and freely chosen to give herself as a self-offering to God and consequently come to know the abundant joy of being in perfect communion with the Divine Will. As William Wordsworth, a Protestant, and co-founder of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English Romantic Movement, says, the Blessed Virgin Mary is "our tainted nature's solitary boast."

It is my hope and prayer that the Roman Catholic Church will soon find a defining way to speak about and lift up this key aspect of not only the Deposit of the Faith but also the *kerygma*, so that our *fiats* to this Mystery might, as St. Louis de Montfort says, unlock its Power among us. It is also my hope and prayer that any and all Christians who have been given the gift by the Holy Spirit of knowing and believing in Our Lady as Co-Redemptrix can be included in working for the solemn definition of this dogma. Such co-operation would allow the dogma's definition to become a means that Our Lady and her Divine Son can use to reconcile and reunite all who have been baptized into Christ by the Grace of the One Mediator, mediated to all of us only through, with and in Our Mother. Because the "mold of Mary" is the true likeness of Christ, consciously choosing to conform ourselves to our Savior's Will and imitating His own dependence upon Mary is

the only sure route towards "Christ's becoming all in all"³¹ and the consequent reconciliation of all Christians.

Who knows? Perhaps Christians, who love and recognize Mary as their Mother, coming together to behold our Mother, might just be the divinely appointed trigger for our long-awaited New Pentecost and Revival. It will certainly be a decisive step toward the fullness of Redemption that both heaven and earth long for in the Second Coming of Christ, a humanity perfectly reconciled and redeemed with one another in Jesus Christ. In the words of St. Louis de Montfort, "[t]he salvation of the world began through Mary and through her it must be accomplished."³² In the words of our Divine Savior, "Behold, your Mother." What awaits us will be the complete realization of the Divine Word's *Fiat*: "It is finished." Amen.

³¹ Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, par. 260.

³² Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, par. 49.